

Pakistan was recently inhabited by dolphins, it seems likely to me that the dolphins in India are a remnant, previously undiscovered subpopulation, rather than that they moved here recently from elsewhere. The closest Indus dolphins are approximately 600 km away in the Indus River". Looking at the present situation on the Sutlej and Beas rivers in India, it is quite impossible for the movement of the species as the barrage gate on the Indo-Pak border area is totally blocked with limited seepage water flowing into Pakistan. As per the information gathered from the locals, Beas is a free flowing river after the Pong dam and has a good depth and flow with less visible pollution. River Beas and its tributaries may have other dolphin populations that need to be identified through detailed surveys.

The River Sutlej was found to be visibly polluted (black coloured water) with a limited flow (shallow) and heavy growth of the Water Hyacinth *Eichornia crassipes*, and is therefore an unsuitable habitat for dolphins. The confluence with River Beas presents a contrasting picture. River Beas is comparatively less polluted (murky water) with a high flow

and presence of deep pools/counter eddy currents/shallow riffle areas/islands in lower stretches (from the confluence upstream 25 km) and forms a suitable habitat for dolphins. However, upstream of the Harike Lake, the habitat is subjected to disturbances such as agricultural activities, ferry services and fishing.

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2. LOCATIONS OF SIND SPARROW SIGHTINGS ALONG THE RAJASTHAN CANAL AND THE RIVER SUTLEJ¹

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In the Indian subcontinent, the Sind Sparrow *Passer pyrrhonotus* is virtually restricted to the floodplains of the River Indus delta and its major tributaries, the Sutlej and Ravi rivers, north to about 34° 6' N (Clement *et al.* 1999). Its Indian range is described as the Indian Punjab on the Beas river near Gurdaspur and along the Sutlej from Harike, east to the bridge on the main road between Ludhiana and Jullunder (Jalandhar), but not further upstream at Rupar (Summers-Smith 1988). It has recently colonised the Yamuna flood plain in eastern Haryana and north Delhi, but remains extremely scarce and local everywhere (Harvey and Sharma 2002).

This note concerns its recent occurrence in

Hanumangarh district of Rajasthan. We have been regularly visiting this area since the last fifteen years or so, but have never come across this species before.

On April 23, 2001 one male and two female Sind Sparrows were found on a Kikar *Acacia nilotica*, on the bund of the Rajasthan Canal (Indira Gandhi Nahar) near Kulchandar and Saharni villages (c. 22 km from Sangaria) in Hanumangarh district, Rajasthan. On both sides of the canal there is a variety of *Acacia* scrub, tamarisk and grass jungle broken by large Kikar and Tali *Dalbergia sissoo*. These native trees are also present along the bunds of the canal to stabilize the soil.

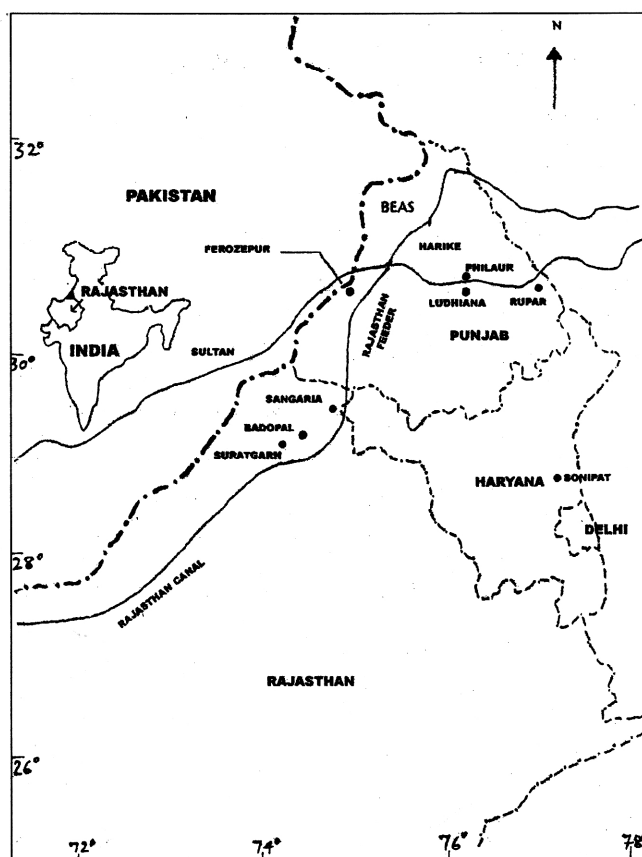


Fig. 1: Locations of Sind Sparrow sightings along the Rajasthan Canal and the river Sutlej

The species was sighted again in Hanumangarh district at Badopal lake near Suratgarh on March 01, 2002. Eight males and five females were counted in two separate groups

on *Acacia tortilis* trees along the road. Two to three birds were observed picking food off the seed pods of the tree.

Apparently, the Sind Sparrow has had a restricted range since it was discovered, with only circumstantial evidence of even short distance migrations. It is a bird of tamarisk and *Acacia* scrub with tall grass or reeds along rivers, pools or marshes, invariably in close association with water (Clement *et al.* 1999). Although basically non-commensal, it has benefited from human activity. The extensive irrigation schemes undertaken after independence in 1947 have transformed the arid plains of the Punjab and Haryana. The lengthy canals, reservoirs and water bodies due to seepage from the canals have facilitated the species to colonise new areas.

The earliest records of the Sind Sparrow in the Indian Punjab are from the R. Sutlej side of Ludhiana, Phillaur and Ferozepur (Whistler 1911, 1913). A hitherto largely sedentary and localized species was first found in Haryana in 2001. The species successfully bred and was recorded from twelve sites in eastern Haryana and north Delhi during January-August, 2001 (Harvey and Sharma 2002).

Apart from the proximity of water, the major constant in the ecological requirement of Sind Sparrows appears to be the *Acacia nilotica* (Harvey and Sharma 2002). Circumstantially, the evidence is that the species has moved into northern Rajasthan recently along the Rajasthan Feeder Canal (Fig. 1). The canal starting from Harike, Punjab evidently provided the known ecological requirements for the species to expand its range. What other factors have helped the species to colonise new areas is not known yet, but it is clearly on the move.

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3. SIGHTING OF INDIAN SKIMMER *RYNCHOPS ALBICOLLIS* (SWAINSON) IN THE PURBASTHALI-GANGES ISLETS, BURDWAN DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL¹

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The globally threatened Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* has a large range with an estimated global 'Extent

of Occurrence' of 2,52,000 sq. km. It has a global population estimated to be 6,000-10,000 individuals (Wetlands